

Hobbies

Bill to change coin designs gains support

By Roger Boye

Nearly 100 members of Congress are supporting legislation calling for fresh designs on circulating coinage—the cent through half dollar.

“Rarely has a coin proposal in Congress gained so many co-sponsors,” said Diane Wolf, a member of the Commission of Fine Arts. “Putting new designs on coins is a wonderful idea whose only enemy is inertia.”

Wolf and others contend that U.S. coinage is stagnant because current designs have been in use too long. They argue that new

images would enhance the beauty of money and generate extra revenue for the government, in part through the sale of additional coin sets to collectors.

Last April the Commission of Fine Arts—an advisory body appointed by the president—voted unanimously to urge the U.S. Treasury and Congress to make sweeping changes in coin designs.

The legislation pending in Congress, which was introduced last fall, would force Treasury officials to place new images on the “tails sides” of all five circulating coin types. Fresh designs would be phased in over six years, with at least one design commemora-

ting the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution.

Also, the legislation would suggest (but not require) that officials consider using new portraits of Abraham Lincoln and the other four presidents who are depicted on the heads sides.

“Washington is a city of compromise; the compromise we made in helping to write the legislation was to keep the five presidents on our coins,” Wolf said on March 31. Protracted debate on whose image would replace Lincoln’s, for example, probably would have doomed the legislation.